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The Moriartys of Yale

Norris G. Osborn

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THE MORIARTYS OF YALE

THE WIDOW

The Moriartys of Yale

By

Norris G. Osborn, '80

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THE MORIARTYS OF YALE

The Moriartys of Yale

By NORRIS G. OSBORN, '80

THE Moriartys were discovered by accident. They were moving at the time in the rut to which they had grown accustomed, drawing pots of ale in a mechanical sort of way, and setting them out on the cheap boards which constituted the bar, in exchange for the nickels and dimes of their regular patrons. Their tap-room was on Wooster Street, New Haven, in a dingy old building, smutted with the dirt stains of many years. The rapidly running stream

of life had thrown them up on its banks, and there they were and there they seemed fated to remain, objects of appreciation to the young mechanics of the neighborhood, who yet knew enough to know that "Frank's" offered a hospitality and possessed a dignity never acquired by any one of the various saloons in the district.

It was in the early Sixties that Frank Moriarty and his worthy wife were discovered by students of Yale. They had received no premonition of the good fortune which awaited them. They had lazily observed groups of Yale students, some with rosy-cheeked girls by their sides, and others without, wander past their

door, but it never occurred to them to ask each other, or their patrons, whither the crowd was going. There was nothing in common between them. They had never met, and the coins which dropped into the Moriarty till were the rewards of sweating brows and aching muscles, not the reckless emptyings of pockets replenished by indulgent parents educating their more fortunate sons. It was nothing to them that the smartly dressed and enthusiastic young persons were on their way to attend the semi-annual college regatta in the lower harbor of New Haven. It was not their business, nor concern, and they turned away from the passing

crowd and attended diligently to their affairs, like the honest, worthy couple they were.

It was destined that Yale College and the Moriartys should not remain strangers. There was an affinity working to bring them together, and it was, therefore, quite logical that at the close of a hotly contested set of races in the harbor, which had called forth the cheers and the hoarse congratulations of the demonstrative students, a small group—members of the Class of 1863—should have entered this Wooster Street alehouse for the required stimulant to restore their exhausted energies. It was in the spirit of Cæsar calling

upon Titinius for "some drink" that they came, and it was old Frank himself, hale and bluff old Frank, who met them, with a hospitality born of an inherent recognition of the presence of "quality," and led them into the family sitting-room, where Mrs. Frank received them with the old-fashioned courtesy which forever afterwards possessed its charm for and exercised its power over the students of Yale. This was the discovery of the Moriartys by Yalensians, as wonderful in its way as the discovery of America by Columbus, a discovery which almost immediately opened up to the enjoyment of the sons of old Eli a new and rare dis-

pensation in their social life. Had the *Columbi* of the Class of 1863 omitted this most important of all their recognized achievements, Frank and "The Widow" would have died on Wooster Street, unknown to the score of classes, more or less, which formed their acquaintance in the years that followed, and whose poets celebrated their virtues in dignified hexameter verse, and in the less stately jingle of the *Courant* and *Record,* and once in the dignified columns of the *Yale Lit.*

But these things happened, just as they do in story books, or as Verdant Green might have arranged them out of the abundance of his experience.

What wonder, then, that Frank moved on to Court Street, where he reigned "forever after," supreme in the affection of Yale students, who gathered nightly about the fireplace in the tap-room of "The Quiet House," to mingle their voices in rollicking song, or to indulge in those characteristic engagements in which the repartee was always clean, if not witty! And what wonder that "The Widow," upon the death of Frank, in the later Seventies, should have transferred her good will and her business to the more aristocratic neighborhood of Temple Street (opposite an Episcopal parish building), where she installed herself as the Mistress of

"Temple Bar"! These were among the chronological results of the discovery made by the thirsty members of the Class of 1863; this is the condensed history of the Moriartys, whose colors flapped proudly and profitably in the breezes until the relentless and undiscriminating angel of death removed them from the happy scenes of their labors.

What a revelation was "The Quiet House" to the student world! Appropriately named and appropriately located, set back the conventional fifty feet from the pavement, its swinging door of brown leather, uniformly darkened with the stains and dirt of years, its inner door of

imitation English oak—how pleasant the atmosphere of sombre color, the characteristic old prints, the odor of real British ale, and the very breath and breathings of good fellowship that greeted one upon one's entrance! There were none of the sad trappings and miserable pomp of the saloon. There was the conventional quiet and order and decency of the English grill room. About the roughhewn old tables where grouped young and handsome boys, some in earnest, some in flippant conversation, with here one poring patiently over the latest copy of *Punch,* there one, evidently a Sophomore, making his first visit, and wonderingly turning the pages of an

obsolete London directory. Occasionally a peal of rippling laughter would ring through the room and startle the quieter visitors, to die away later in the evening in the semi-martial melody of Delta Beta Xi—a signal to all that conversation must give way to the government of song.

And the bar! How modest, unassuming and unobstrusive it was, short, stumpy and fat, with its row of ivory draught handles, saucy witnesses of their own abundant supply, while back against the wall, on a shelf of sympathetic proportions, stood the half-pint, pint and quart pewter mugs with glass bottoms, timidly yet resolutely concealing the

rare old liquor in rarer bottles of odd shapes. In the center of them stood insolently, with its neck an inch taller than its less worthy companions, the imitation cut glass decanter which held Frank's favorite tipple, Tom Gin; next it, its more youthful associate, the St. Croix Rum jug, from the contents of which, upon a cold night in winter, when the snow swirled past the exposed window glass, and the fire in the grate blushed red from a sense of its naked modesty, Frank, with his own hands, and in deference to the wishes of his Senior friends, would brew a delicious hot spiced glass.

It was a rare old place, "The Quiet House." Ben Jonson would have

found it congenial, Dickens would have gone to it from his desk in a newspaper office, Thackeray would have flicked the dust from his shining boots upon entering it, and even Shakespeare and Bacon, and the other worthies of the reign of good Queen Bess, would have flocked to its tables and greedily drunk its ale and devoured its rarebits and its golden bucks and its grilled sardines, and with that satisfaction which seems to have been more or less peculiarly theirs, would have trudged off to their quarters, as the gray dawn was breaking, arm in arm, with uneven steps, perhaps, but with lighter hearts and unimpaired digestion.

And there was Frank himself, six feet in his stockings, tipping the scales at two hundred and thirty, broad of beam, with an accent which was a curious and sometimes a startling consolidation of Irish from the northern tier and of Scotch from the grayest and craggiest of crests, a hand with the grasp of steel, and a tweed suit suggesting warmth in the cold of winter and coolness in the heat of summer. Found in his tap-room, when in a reminiscent mood, and surrounded by the externals of a British rearing, one had to accept him as a true subject by birth of the Queen. And yet what mattered it whence he came? He was there, at "The Quiet

House," big and muscular, as if the prize ring might have witnessed his skill, full of consideration for his young guests, careful to restrain them if the pace became hot, fond of a good anecdote or story, and not averse to the exaggeration which passes for local color, not a bit afraid of an intolerant Senior, and always parental toward the Sophomore. He had, as all men have, his favorites. He did not sit at every table, though he visited each to assure himself of the comfort and happiness of his guests, and if occasionally he was seen to take a vacant seat at a round table, refilling with his own hands the emptied tankards, and with his more intimate

knowledge of their actual worth and fragrance selecting the cigars to be smoked from the multitude of boxes brought on by the attendant, the proof was convincing and conclusive that he was with his especial admirers and the especially admired. Upon such occasions Frank was a never-ending source of wonder to the young eyes which beheld him and the untrained ears which hearkened to the tales he wove from his Irish wit and his Scotch imagination. He was to these youngsters a page torn from a history of Fleet Street, London, and, during an early acquaintance, accepted as a hero from the downs of Epsom. Frank was cordial, polite after the

manner of the successful tapster, constant in his attention, as shrewd a broth of a lad as ever peddled his wares at Donnybrook Fair.

And there was Mrs. Frank, who became better known, when she became the Mistress of "Temple Bar," as The Widow. In the earlier days at "The Quiet House" she sat in the family sitting-room, back of the tap-room, and rocked in the stiff old rocking chair, more suggestive of Puritan New England than of Primitive Old England. Shorter of stature than Frank, well-to-do in avoirdupois, with a becoming cap on her Saxon head, and her knitting needles in her hand, she was as much a feature of the

quaint furnishings as the odd glass signs which hung on the wall, proclaiming in burning letters of gold the limited cuisine of the resort: "WELSH RAREBIT," "GOLDEN BUCK," "EGGS ON TOAST," "GRILLED SARDINES."

With the rush of evening business and the demand for those refreshments, Mrs. Frank laid aside her knitting, and deserted her rocker for the old-fashioned range, the melted cheese, the Milford eggs and the fresh toasted bread. Who ever cooked a rarebit, or a buck, equal to this good old lady? The cheese ebbed and flowed like a sluggish but clear river over its banks of steaming toast—sans string, sans indigestion,

sans everything but delight and refreshment to the inner man. The Moriarty cheese was the product of an honest dairy, of just the right flavor, sharp but not pungent, and the eggs were from the pretty village of Milford, where appreciative hens laid them—hens that cackled their notes of stirring welcome whenever the old black Moriarty nag, pulling the Moriarty phaeton and its distinguished passengers, hove in sight for their periodical supply. Mrs. Frank made rarebits and bucks in the good old days—the halcyon days, Frank used to call them, with a broad accent on the "a"—when it would have been justly considered a sacrilege to include

Worcestershire sauce and mustard among the ingredients. They were as delicate to the taste as the historic pies of our grandmothers.

And what curious attendants! Surely such waiters were never seen before. There was old Cooke, whose shoes burst with the abundance of his pedal ailments, whose hand shook with the fright of approaching age, and whose smile, always generous if not spontaneous, disclosed that grim cavern of a mouth, filled with its flat and broad teeth, reflecting their copper light, like so many uneven headstones in a neglected cemetery. Where "Cooke" came from, and how it happened that

when he disappeared another of similar design and mold took his place, and moved about as if he was born to his surroundings, neither Frank nor Mrs. Frank could be made to explain. They answered all such inquiries with a forbearing smile, which intimated that it was not worth while talking about,—like the famous old lady who figured in our nursery rhymes, they had a shoe full of them. They were as rare as the Moriartys themselves or the family chaise.

There was one evening in the year when "The Quiet House" gave up its quiet and became pandemonium. Frank was powerless to restrain the emotions of his reckless and doubly

stimulated guests, and with a wisdom which would have been precocious in a younger man reluctantly surrendered to the enemy, and found consolation in the thought that "That sort o' thing occurs but wance a year." It was the evening of the afternoon when the Senior elections were given out on the Campus. It was the storm of Democracy breaking loose for the last time, prior to the formal acceptance of the restraints of social aristocracy. Those were Walpurgis nights, the elect and the disappointed joining in a common celebration, and quite regardless of conflicting sensations. If the "Bones" men retained for themselves and their friends the

lower floor, leaving the "Keys" men to accommodate themselves to the upper, the distinction was soon lost sight of, and "Bones" and "Keys" men and neutrals mingled together in celebration of the Moriartys, who soon became the common cause of the characteristic orgy. It was upon one of these occasions that a distinguished son of old Eli—now dead, peace to his sacred ashes—mounted the table in the corner of the room and combatted with a classmate, similarly mounted in an opposite corner, the proposition that hot spiced rum was better with four than more spices. "I've twied hot spithed wum," he lisped, as he swayed to the rhythm of

his emotion, "in every form (cheers), and I know what I am talking about. (Bully for you, old man!) I have twied one spith, and two spithes, three spithes (Glorious! Hurrah!), four spithes, five spithes (Hear! Hear!) and thix spithes, and upon my word as a sthudent of Yale I declare that a hot spithed wum without thix spithes is but a vulgar thubterfuge." Here followed prolonged cheering, and the abrupt departure of his defeated antagonist, who could but point to a record of "four spithes." It was a night of student frolicking, ending with all present forming in the stately double line, and actually performing in silence, broken only by the occa-

sional hiccough of a slightly tipsy celebrant, the famous "Keys" walk, with a newly elected "Bones" man in the lead. Silently and sedately they trudged to the steps of the old College Chapel in the center of the Campus, and sang with deliciously concealed merriment, and not uncommonly in witty discord, the well-known music and words of "Gaily the Troubadour." This closed the annual celebration, as regular in its recurrence as the burial of Euclid, never more to be indulged in by the same actors. The next year brought with it new heroes, new victims, but the same old plot and story.

It would not be a difficult under-

FRANK

taking to recall a hundred such incidents, each characteristic of its odd conditions. It matters not what form such innocent student devilment took in the interesting days of the reign of Frank Moriarty at "The Quiet House." The important fact is that it was mischievousness, and not viciousness, which sought an expression. The atmosphere of the resort, the quiet, good-natured dignity of the proprietor, and the uncommonness of sights and incidents which belong to the bar-room or saloon, all worked to produce upon the mind a lasting impression of the obligated cleanliness of Yale life and the spirit of Democracy which dominates it.

On the whole, "The Quiet House" was well named. To the student mind a song is neither noise nor hilarity. It is what the whistle is to the youngster, an escape from spontaneous combustion. So, the famous old student resort was eminently respectable—digs and deacons could be seen there without compromising their reputations for high stand and piety—gray-haired grads were not afraid to visit it with their undergraduate offspring—and the Faculty visited it in the vacation season—the conversation and repartee were clean, and roysterers were rare and never welcome visitors. If Frank knew how to concede a special license upon a

special occasion, he also knew when to abridge it, for though crudely educated at the school of human experience, there was in him a genuine love of youth and a never-failing concern in its irresponsibilities. When the old fellow had drawn his last pot of ale, and mixed his last hot spiced rum, and recommended his last cigar, and put an end to it all by a turn of his toes up to the yellow and white daisies which abound in such picturesque luxuriance in and about New Haven, there were young men at Yale, and older men in the world of affairs too, who were not ashamed to own up to a sharp pang of regret at the loss of an old 'un, who had found his way

to their hearts through their palates and stomachs.

The Widow was more particularly identified with the earlier days of "Temple Bar" on Temple Street. Though she took with her there some of the quainter furniture that had adorned the scenes of Frank's triumph she could not take with her the characteristic soberness, the oddly designed and figured window screens, and the general coziness of the older place. "Temple Bar" appeared new, too spick and span. There were the familiar prints on the new walls covered with paper of an unfamiliar brightness, red coated riders who were still jumping ditches on slim bay

horses followed by dogs, each one of them bearing the same monotonous marks; and there were flaring signs still proclaiming the not extended cuisine of the new resort; but they were new signs, the tables were fresh from the cabinetmakers, there was more wall space and hence new and painfully modern pictures to relieve it, the leathern cuspidors looked unfamiliar, there was not a speck of sawdust on the bare floor, there was an additional room, and the bar,—that shrinking, modest bar of "The Quiet House,"—was shut off by itself, exiled to a corner on the ground floor, as if ashamed of its refreshing vocation.

It was a sharp transition and a hard one to which to accommodate oneself, though there was the grate fire left, and the blessed round table, and the good old woman, with her kindly face and her fearfully flowing skirts. It was the widow's cap which adorned her head now, not the less beautiful cap of service. Surely all could not be lost with The Widow at the helm! Nor was all lost. "Temple Bar" soon asserted itself and found its place, and flourished like a green bay tree under the ripening and refining influence of its proprietress. Her welcome was as cordial as her husband's had been, and upon rare occasions, when the

tables were unoccupied, the old lady would drop into a vacant chair by one's side to "reminisce."

It was an eventful evening in February when the door of Temple Bar was closed to the public and The Widow was presented by a group of her admirers with the photograph of the original Temple Bar in London. The fumes of the Apple Dumpling, which she had cooked in true British style with her own hands, fill the air to this day with its fragrance. It was an historic occasion, with its incessant flow of wit and wisdom, the never-emptied flask of wine, the melodious outbursts of song, and the speech of acceptance from The Widow! No

Queen e'er received a more royal, or a more respectful greeting. Each man to his feet in a jiffy, as glass to glass, amid suppressed cheers and expectant smiles, the animated party awaited the opening remarks of the kind and much moved old hostess. And the applause which greeted the picture when it had been hung in the place of honor between the front windows and unveiled, with the extravagant ceremony which would have characterized the unveiling of a rare masterpiece upon the walls of a great museum of art! It was one of those occasions which the brush touches in vain, partly because of its incongruity and partly because of its mock solem-

nity. There the print hangs in imagination to this day, looking down upon another generation of youngsters to whom "The Widow" is a myth. They nudge one another and wonder whence it came. Put your educated young noses to the frame and smell the fumes of the dumpling! Put your ears to the glass and hear the echo of voices, some of which are as silent as the night they so often disturbed with their laughter and song!

That "A Temple Bar Association" should have sprung into existence from this chapter of student history was as logical an upheaval of youthful souls with but a single thought, as its decay and ruin were inevitable

upon the discharge of the last of the original donors of the picture from the halls of Yale College, "an educated man." There were none then remaining who were eligible to fill the vacant chairs about the family mahogany, Friday evening, at seven, when The Widow herself, her steaming face bathed in the kindliest—yes, the most rollicking of smiles, broiled the thick beefsteaks and fried the thick flat potatoes, and served them on odd pieces of blue china as old as the hills, the first inroads upon which had been carelessly made by the mechanics of Wooster Street. They were Bohemian feasts with the hostess in her royal place at the head of

the table, surrounded by loyal knights of her castle, and before them the selected tankards of pewter and glass, each bearing the characteristic scratch of its owner's finger nail, secretly made at an opportune moment when the "cordon bleu" was bending over the fire in the kitchen. It must have been the same spirit of harmless insolence, working within the breasts of a much younger generation, which led to the organization of "the Velvet Cup." Those of us who have quenched our thirst from the vast and barbarian depths of the silver tankard have done so with the wine from without and a toast to the sweet memory of "The Widow" from

within touching the lips at the same moment.

It was in the Seventies, after a rattling and a victorious game of baseball at Hamilton Park with Yale's old and honored antagonist from Cambridge, that "Temple Bar" was the scene of an occurrence which illustrated the influence of Mrs. Frank over her young charges, and the respect they had for her as a woman. The front room was choked with a throng of light-hearted students, who were ranged about the round table, upon which stood in a quart mug the precious cold contents of the last bottle of champagne—the pioneer of the loving cups which have

followed in such abundance. The picture was that of an amphitheatre, the circle of human beings rising symmetrically to a height equal to that attained by celebrants perched upon the backs of chairs. The crimson of Harvard harmonized symmetrically with the blue of Yale, and nowhere were visible the traces of the fierce conflict of the afternoon. "Harvard, Fair Harvard" was as melodiously sung as "Here's to good old Yale" was snappily chanted.

The hands of the clock were rapidly moving towards the closing hour, though few could see them through the clouds and rifts of smoke, and fewer still cared for the exasper-

ating accuracy of their record. The merriest and wittiest of college song-birds was concluding the first verse, with appropriate and inimitable grimaces, of that popular melody, "Razors Flying in the Air," which had just done splendid service at a college minstrel performance. The prematurely gray front locks of the singer hung over his forehead in graceful curls, his dark eyes were ablaze with the excitement of the moment, and his olive cheeks and brilliant white teeth formed a contrast in color which added to the interest of his clever powers of mimicry. Harvard men vied with Yale men to spur him on, while at the close

of each line came a yell and a shriek, cutting the air with the screech of a rifle ball, which located beyond the power of concealment the stimulating presence of his irrepressible and impulsive roommate. The Widow stood in the door leading to the tap-room restlessly moving her eyes from the singer, in fear lest the song should not be completed with the customary jig, to the animated face of the persistent possessor of the piercing yell, and hence to the unfeeling prosaic old clock on the mantelpiece. Unappreciative old clock, with what aggravating clearness you rang out the inconvenient hour of midnight, just as the room was reverberating with the com-

mingled echoings of a clear baritone voice and an interrupting cheer, and the end of the song story approaching!

"Twelve o'clock, gentlemen," wearily and sadly remarked the hostess, as she moved slowly toward the half-emptied mug of wine, through the line of students promptly made for her. Taps had sounded and the base of supplies had been cut off. The merrymakers had arisen to their feet, and every head was uncovered. The time for "Good Night" had come, and as the handsome lads strode off toward the Campus, singing one of the popular college melodies of the day, it was more than likely

that as the good old lady put out the lights and went to her bedroom, her ears were alert to catch the last faint sounds of the song which died on the summer air, and her lips parted in a smile which told its own eloquent story of the innocence of the evening's association and her satisfaction in it.

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